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ABSTRACT

The guide is addressed to the colleagues of the foreign language assistant in the languages departments since the assistant's work, to a large extent, depends on a successful relationship with them. The foreign language assistant is defined as a native speaker of a foreign language, e.g. French, German, Spanish, Italian, who serves in a British school for a 1-year appointment. Assistants are usually between 20 and 25 years old, female, and future teachers. It is asserted that the formerly restricted role of the assistants, that of preparing oral examinations, providing the only spoken foreign language pupils ever heard (in some cases), and minimal involvement in departmental activities, should now involve the development of all language skills for a wider range of pupils. It is pointed out that this new role consists not only of linguistic and social contact with pupils, but of the preparation of materials and in-service training of language teachers. A summary of the main administrative arrangements that are typically made before an assistant arrives at a school is presented. The assistant's arrival and induction at the school are described, and the assistant's role in the school and in the classroom (middle school, intermediate level, sixth form) are also discussed. One appendix summarizes aids and activities for the assistant and another lists reference materials. (EJS)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

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Introduction

Provision of courses for foreign language assistants is now standard procedure in most local authorities. There is also much good written advice for the Assistant, ranging from articles in language journals to manuals and guides available from publishers (see Appendix 2). This is all as it should be, recognising the special needs of the Assistant, who cannot be expected to make a worthwhile contribution to language teaching without some preparation. The effectiveness of the Assistant's work, however, depends to a large extent on a successful partnership with colleagues in the languages department, and it is to the latter that this publication is addressed.

The guide has been compiled by a working party set up by the South-East group of NALA to consider aspects of the Assistants scheme directly relevant to the adviser and the language teacher. In July 1976, in cooperation with the Central Bureau, the working party organised a one-day course in London on the use of Assistant, with participants from local authorities throughout the south-east of England. As a result of the course the working party undertook to compile this guide and has incorporated the ideas of numerous teachers and advisers, whose help is gratefully acknowledged. Thanks are also due to the many advisers and teachers throughout the United Kingdom who read the draft and made useful suggestions for additions and amendments.

NB It would be difficult, if not impossible, to put into practice all the suggestions made in this guide. Administrative arrangements and priorities within schools and local authorities differ considerably and those responsible for the Assistant will wish to adapt the advice which follows to suit the needs of their own situation.

Feminine pronouns have been used throughout, reflecting the predominance of female Assistants in the scheme, and French is cited in all examples as representing foreign languages in general. Finally, the authors offer an apology to colleagues in Scotland and Northern Ireland; throughout the document the terminology used – eg for examinations, classes, etc. – is that employed mainly in England and Wales.

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1 Before the Assistant arrives

Schools may find it useful to have a summary of the main administrative arrangements that are made before the Assistant arrives in the school. The calendar below includes the school's own responsibilities. The pattern indicated does not of course apply in detail to all LEAs but is an amalgam of common practice.

Autumn term

Student or young teacher applies for an Assistant post through university/home national authority (closing date in most countries mid-February).

November

Central Bureau sends out initial letter to LEA requesting estimated numbers of Assistants for following academic year.

After budget clearance, LEA invites schools to state requirements for Assistants for the following year.

December

Schools reply to LEA by end of Christmas Term.

February

Complete returns from LEA on Assistants are sent to Central Bureau by 1st February. These returns should indicate any special wishes, eg Assistants from linked area, preferences for particular nationalities.

Latest month for applications by Assistants to national authorities to spend second year in United Kingdom. *Because of the high demand on places, there is never any guarantee of reappointment.*

Sample interviews by HMI take place in France/Federal Republic of Germany/ Austria/Switzerland and Spain.

March/April

Central Bureau receives Assistant dossiers from partner organisations abroad.

May

Central Bureau sends dossiers plus documentation to LEA.

LEA (adviser) matches applications with requirements, sending dossiers to schools. A few larger authorities notify Assistants that their applications are being considered by schools in the authority.

Headteacher/head of department contacts parents concerning Assistant's accommodation (see note 1 below).

LEA returns to Central Bureau dossiers of unsuitable candidates without delay. Replacement dossiers are then issued.

May/June

(a) Head of school writes to the Assistant (if acceptable) formally offering post and enclosing Central Bureau leaflet SDN100.

(b) If the Assistant accepts, the head of department sends further information about the school (see note 2), information concerning accommodation and relevant study courses at local colleges. French students should be told to make arrangements with the French Institutes in London or Edinburgh to sit any examination during their year in Britain (see *Quelques Renseignements à l'Intention des Assistants Français en Grande-Bretagne).* A list of useful teaching aids could also be sent (see Appendix 1). In certain circumstances a letter from the current Assistant could also usefully be sent.

(c) School returns dossier to LEA with Assistant's decision.

NB If the Assistant does not reply within three weeks the school should make further contact (letter, telegram, telephone) fixing a deadline. If a reply is still not forthcoming the dossier should be returned to the LEA who will forward it to the Central Bureau.

Central Bureau confirms the appointment directly to the Assistant ie letter to EEC nationals, certificate of appointment to non-EEC nationals (SDF100).

June/July

End of year meeting with Assistants.

End of year meeting with heads of department and persons responsible for Assistants.

Some LEAs (advisers) send letter of welcome to incoming Assistants and invitation to induction course.

September/October

LEA induction course (see note 3) followed by other meetings throughout the year.

Note 1: Sample letter written by Head of school

'As parents probably know, this school, like many other secondary schools, employs French and German/Spanish/Italian foreign language assistants, who come to us each September to take up a one year appointment. They are normally aged between 20 and 25 years, students, and usually, though not in all cases, future teachers. The school undertakes responsibility, at least initially, for securing accommodation for them, but in view of the comparative scarcity, and especially since the dossiers of new appointees often do not arrive until the second half of the summer term, this is not always easy. It may well be that there are parents living within reasonable travelling distance of the school who would be able to offer such accommodation on a reasonable commercial basis and might be attracted by the prospect of the company of a young lodger of this

type, offering an additional link with the school and with a foreign country. The incoming Assistants are usually flexible in their requirements, accepting either full board and integration with the family or largely looking after themselves. A bedroom is the minimum requirement. We should therefore be glad to compile a short register of any parents who would be interested in being approached (naturally without any obligation) when details reach us in June/July. Any such parents are asked to let us know as soon as possible details of the type of accommodation and arrangement envisaged and also any preference for nationality or sex'.

Note 2: Head of department's letter to Assistant

The letter could well include the following points:

(a) Head of department's home address and telephone number and any change of address and telephone number during the holidays.

(b) Name, address and telephone number of one colleague.

(c) Details of any arrangements that can be made for accommodation and a request that the Assistant should reply *immediately* if she wishes to make her own arrangements. The Assistant could be invited to use the head of department's address as a forwarding address for luggage.

(d) Date of first day of Autumn term and recommended date of arrival in the town for the Assistant.

(e) Request that Assistant write at least one week before arrival giving time and date of departure, name of departure station, airport, number of flight, route, together with time and date of arrival, name of station or airport.

Enclosures could include the following:

(a) A magazine about the school giving details of organisation, house system, tutor grouping, buses to get you there etc, plan of school, street plan of neighbourhood.

(b) Organisation of the modern languages department: equipment, filmstrips, slides, records.

(c) Outline of the syllabus, topics, projects.

(d) Copy of the Assistant's timetable, if ready, with explanation of ages and level of groups to be taken for conversation. Name of each teacher to contact for each group.

(e) Suggested programme of lessons for the first term for each year.

(f) Relevant extracts from syllabuses of public examinations, ie oral tests.

(g) Useful things to bring (see Appendix 1).

Note 3: Sample programme of induction course

Although induction courses vary in length from one day at a teachers' centre to six days in residence at a college of education, there is considerable similarity in the topics covered. The following is a sample programme:

1. Description of local authority, its educational system and social profile.
2. Administrative arrangements affecting the Assistant eg social security, salaries etc.
3. British schools and certain essential differences from schools abroad.
4. Modern languages in this country.
5. The role of the Assistant in the school.
6. The examination system.
7. Advice on how the Assistant might do her job.
8. Cultural and recreational facilities available.

NB It is important to remember here that briefing of speakers is vital. This may be the first time the Assistants have had to sit through a day's talks in English. Many officials tend to talk too fast, assume a thorough knowledge of local geography, abbreviations and personalities, and use dialect. They often do not realise procedures can vary, depending on the nationality of the Assistant (eg not all German Assistants are from the Federal Republic of Germany).

2 Arrival and induction in the school

Arrival

By the time the Assistants arrive they should know from the information already sent to them a good deal about the school and the context in which they will be working. Ideally, they will have received some form of communication from the LEA, the Headteacher, the head of department and possibly the outgoing Assistant, preparing them to some extent for the year ahead.

The head of department may have had the opportunity to check the accommodation provided and in some cases will be able to meet the Assistants on arrival and take them to their lodgings.

Introductions

The first few days of the new term are, of course, extremely busy. The Assistant should be introduced to the staff in general, either at a pre-term meeting or on the first day of term. Personal introductions are advisable to the Headteacher, to all members of the modern languages staff, to others who are known to be sympathetic to Assistants and to those who share a particular Assistant's interest (sports, art, music, craft etc). It is important also that she should get to know the school secretary, the caretaker, any A/V or language laboratory technicians etc. A public welcome from the Headteacher or chairman of the staff association is recommended, but individual introductions to all members of staff may be impossible or confusing. It is always useful to point out to Assistants that they will more easily establish contact with members of staff by making the first conversational approach themselves.

Settling in

The Assistant's main interests and hobbies will have been noted from the dossier and introductions to staff as well as the tour of the school and local facilities can be structured accordingly. In particular, a visit to the town should enable her to find her bearings and locate places of particular relevance (eg the college of further education, health centre, library, and, for non-EEC nationals, the police station). Sixth formers can also be very useful in showing the Assistant around the school and perhaps the locality.

Some schools would prefer not to have the Assistant present during the first week of term. However, useful work can be done then and many heads of department delegate responsibility for the Assistant during this time to another member of the department, perhaps one closer to the Assistant in age and interests.

At this stage it may be better for Assistants to be in school for short periods, supervised, rather than for the whole day, when for considerable periods little attention can be given to them. Assistants can be using their time effectively in several ways:

(a) by looking closely at the textbooks and course materials used by the department;

(b) by looking at the record book kept by the previous year's Assistant (this will also indicate to the new Assistant the importance of keeping an accurate record of her own activities);

(c) by learning how to record materials on tape.

Observation

Since the Assistant will not normally be a qualified or experienced teacher careful, basic advice and preparation will be necessary. As soon as practicable, the Assistant should begin classroom observation to gain a general insight into the way foreign languages are taught within the school. To ensure maximum benefit, teachers whose lessons are observed should discuss them with the Assistant both before and afterwards. The Assistant may thus become aware of the level of language attainment in the various classes and absorb significant information about teaching methods eg question and answer techniques; when and how to correct mistakes; the need to structure and simplify the language used; the use of English; the importance of variety and the use of visual aids. She can then be involved in work with the teacher in the class room and where appropriate with small groups withdrawn from the class.

She will also be able to note different teaching styles and gauge realistic levels of pupil performance. Observation could well take place from time to time through the year rather than be restricted to the initial period. The head of department should also observe the Assistants in action where possible. Much careful help with lesson planning will be necessary ("Practise the *passé composé* this week" is totally inadequate) – and the Assistant should be encouraged to work to an overall plan. For the Assistant to ask pupils "What shall we talk about today?" is a sign of despair or lack of interest and many heads of department carefully structure the Assistants' initial sessions themselves. They should ensure that Assistants are aware of the form and content of the GCE and CSE examinations by showing them past papers, etc.

Assessment of the Assistant's potential

In such an induction programme the modern languages department will have ample opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Assistant and to answer the following questions: Is she self-reliant or lacking in confidence? Cooperative? Imaginative? How clearly and quickly does she speak? Is she

aware of realistic levels of attainment to be aimed at in the various classes? The answers to these questions will help the head of department to decide the Assistant's eventual timetable and method of work.

By the end of the first month it should be clear how well the Assistant is going to integrate into the school and the community. It is to be hoped that by now she will have received invitations to the homes of members of staff, will perhaps have accompanied school visits and will be attending certain lessons within the school, eg sixth-form English literature or humanities. She should also by now be in a position to pursue her leisure interests and study-needs in the community in general.

3 Induction in the LEA

Objectives and programme

Induction courses for Assistants have become more and more necessary and widely practised for a number of reasons:

(a) Assistants have a chance of meeting each other and discussing their own background and current situations. Some Assistants feel a sense of isolation during the early days and welcome the opportunity of meeting an *âme soeur*. It is particularly useful, for example, if the only two Algerians appointed in an LEA know of each other's existence.

(b) Assistants can meet the LEA adviser and realise that there is someone outside the school to whom they can turn. They will also become aware of the interrelated but distinct roles of the school, the LEA and CBEVE within the Assistants scheme.

(c) The induction course complements the methodology studies undertaken within the school and offers the advantage of an intensive course removed from the immediate pressures of the school situation. Various techniques and materials can be used at the course; videotapes of assistants in action can give examples of good or less than good practice and provide a basis for discussion; the presence of a suitable former Assistant is very valuable. In some cases groups of pupils will be available to provide a teaching situation, albeit slightly artificial. This and the often animated debate which follows can be a very effective form of training, though the shyer Assistants may be unwilling to give a public performance. A talk by an experienced head of department, and a discussion led by a modern language teacher and based on specific materials and assignments are also helpful. If time permits, some instruction on the use and value of certain items of 'hardware' is useful. At the end of the course, Assistants should be better informed about their teaching role and how to fulfil it. They will be aware that in most cases it is not limited to 'conversation' but necessarily involves a teaching element and a variety of techniques and approaches. They will also have been given a general picture of modern language teaching in Britain so that they can better understand the context in which they work and the significance of such developments as primary school French, the teaching of languages across the ability range, mixed ability groupings etc. Further meetings throughout the year also give the Assistants time to develop their own ideas and, perhaps with the adviser's help, to produce materials as a team.

(d) The Assistants should also be given the opportunity to meet chief or area education officers, teachers' centre wardens and other members of the LEA team in order to enable them to understand more of the workings of our educational system and to provide information on the various types of school, the examination system, the systems of banding, setting and streaming and the training, recruitment, payment and promotion of

teachers. All this enables Assistants to make meaningful comparisons with their own country's educational system and to begin to make sense of the jargon that they will hear daily. They should also be made aware of the various associations and organisations which will be of considerable help to them during their year (French Institute, Goethe-Institut, Hispanic Council, Austrian Institute, Italian Institute, CILT, British Council etc.).

(e) The induction course also complements the work of the school in presenting the local environment. An FE lecturer responsible for a local course geared to the needs of the Assistants can explain the content of the course and enrolment procedure. A list of adult education courses should be available, together with a list of local societies, from the public library. It is important that the Assistants should feel that the local area values their presence and is concerned about their welfare. They will almost certainly be made welcome at meetings of local French circles and certain functions of the Rotary Club.

Timing of the course

The timing of the LEA induction course is important and raises certain problems.

The first week of term has the advantages of:

(i) withdrawing Assistants at a time when the pressure on schools is at its most severe;

(ii) providing information about study opportunities before classes are fully subscribed;

(iii) discovering at the outset any mutual misunderstandings about the scheme or the Assistant's relations with the school, so that quick action may be taken.

However a number of Assistants will not have arrived by this time and a late September/October course ensures that almost all the Assistants will be present. Moreover they will perhaps have a better command of English after a few weeks in this country and be better placed to assimilate the information provided.

They will also bring to the methodology sessions the fruits of their own experience, even if this has consisted mainly of observation. If the later date is chosen, the first few weeks in school and the induction course should be seen as a whole and planned as such. In this way heads of department must clearly be key figures in the whole process of induction. Whatever date is decided upon, the importance of the Assistant's attendance should be strongly stressed in the first letter sent to her. The induction course in most LEAs seems to run for three days and, where possible, is residential. If the course includes part of the weekend it is sometimes easier to ensure the participation of local heads of department.

In-service training

Contact between the LEA and Assistants should be maintained regularly throughout the year after the induction course. Meetings held periodically at the teachers' centre will enable the LEA adviser to monitor the development of the scheme, advise on problems and gain useful ideas for making the induction course more effective. The meetings can perhaps sometimes take the form of social occasions – parties, dances, etc where Assistants may be persuaded to offer examples of their own musical culture.

A de-briefing session towards the end of the year enables the adviser to have a general picture. Discussions with Assistants can be tape recorded and in some cases their lessons video-taped for use at the following year's induction course, though the live presence of a suitable second year Assistant is even more valuable.

Induction courses for Assistants are sometimes complemented by meetings with teachers in the summer term to discuss the most effective use of Assistants, and to ensure that the scheme is fully understood and the Assistant catered for, both in and out of school, to the best of the school's ability. If these courses are held annually, different members of the language department will have an opportunity of attending each year.

4 The Assistant in the school

With which pupils?

An important initial decision has to be made: With which groups should the Assistant be involved? The general feeling is that older, abler pupils should have priority (especially fifth and sixth year examination groups) but that as many groups as possible should have a chance to be involved with the Assistant in the course of the year. There are other possibilities:

- 'guest' appearances from time to time;
- redeployment of Assistants after 'O' and 'A' level and CSE examinations.

In the case where the Assistant is shared between schools her timetable is often changed after Christmas in order to enable all classes who might benefit to meet her. In certain areas the Assistant spends a specific block of time in one school and then transfers to the other. Pupil groups should not consist solely of volunteers, though the Assistant should be spared difficult pupils and encouraged to report her problems.

Organisation of the Assistant's work

There are four main types of organisation:

(a) Small groups withdrawn from the class

(b) Small groups outside normal lesson time

(c) Split classes (divided between the Assistant and teacher, following different programmes in the same room)

(d) A form of team teaching.

(a) is usually most effective with older pupils, but may also be much appreciated by younger children. A problem then arises: What work should the French teacher do while the group is absent? Should the Assistant merely duplicate what the teacher is doing? Will the withdrawal group miss important new developments? The most common solution is for the teacher *either* to base his own lesson very much on conversation and language games *or* to organise a 'surgery' lesson with an opportunity for individual pupils to seek guidance on particular difficulties.

(b) applies to fifth and sixth-form groups when lunch time, before and after school and private study periods can be used.

(c) immediately halves the pupil/teacher ratio and can be effective, but it needs careful organisation and may lead to a noisy classroom.

(d) with careful preparation can be used to introduce dialogues, playlets reading, discussion etc. There is also an opportunity to organise group work. It is important that both teacher and Assistant have a very clear idea of the aims

and objectives. There must be a real sharing of functions.

Frequency of contact

For the Assistant to get to know her pupils and plan a coherent programme contact should be regular. Once a fortnight is felt to be a bare minimum. Where circumstances make this impossible it might be better to introduce intensive contact over a short period.

Sharing between schools

This is sometimes necessary for practical reasons and can also give the Assistant a broader picture of British schools. Sharing in two similar schools has some advantages; but different types (eg a middle school and a high school) may afford more scope. However, sharing usually means that the Assistant becomes less involved in school life and activities.

Allocation of time

Sometimes, depending on her personality, the Assistant can be used profitably with less-able groups or with French/European Studies groups, but since only twelve hours are available these may not be given high priority. Some flexibility may be possible, eg sixteen hours one week, eight hours the next. Some of the time (eg one hour) may need to be set aside specifically for tape-recording, making materials or planning with staff. Where possible, the Assistant should be given one completely free day per week, either to allow her to pursue her own studies or to lengthen the weekend.

The lunch hour, as well as time after school, may be used by the Assistant for involvement in extra-curricular activities, giving lessons to sixth formers, or organising a language club.

The Assistant can also be considered as a school (as opposed to departmental) resource and act as adviser, eg on aspects of French geography or history. The school should try to harness the individual talents of the Assistant in such activities as play-production, swimming, singing, and other practical skills for the mutual benefit of school and Assistant.

She can also participate usefully in school journey groups, visits to theatre etc.

Especially during public examination periods the Assistant can be involved much more generally in the work of the school.

Where and how

The Assistant should be given clear guidance on her role in the school and provided with a scheme of work, indicating on which areas she should concentrate. It is also important to point out the availability and whereabouts of materials, resources and A/V aids. The timetable should indicate which rooms are available; it is not the Assistant's job to hunt for accommodation. Where suitable rooms are not available, the Assistant is often of more use in the classroom with the teacher. The Assistant may well find the more relaxed atmosphere of British schools confusing and need clear guidance on discipline.

Monitoring pupils' progress

Assistants should be encouraged to record the progress of pupils and their comments incorporated in a general profile of the pupil. Tape recordings of pupils in action are often a useful guide to the efficiency of the lesson. They can also be used for intensive courses or *rattrapage* for individual pupils or groups and should be encouraged to take advantage of particular periods of the year (Christmas, Bastille Day etc), to supply background knowledge.

As a member of staff

The Assistant should immediately be made to feel an important member of the modern languages department and should know all foreign language teachers and attend departmental meetings. Locally, the head of department should have a regular, structured weekly meeting with the Assistant to discuss progress and future planning. She should also be given guidance on administrative matters such as the procedure for asking for leave of absence. etc. The Assistant should be invited to attend staff meetings and be provided with any relevant documentation *(Notes for new staff* etc). If she intends to become a teacher, visits to other schools/types of school can usefully be arranged, as well as a discussion with officials from the education office. Above all, she should enjoy the continuous support of the head of department and modern languages staff throughout the year. Too often this is offered only during the first few weeks.

5 The Assistant in the classroom

A In the middle school

The Assistant can be of immense value in middle schools for two reasons: the courses used will almost certainly be based on aural comprehension and oral fluency, and there may be a shortage of fluent French speakers on the staff. In most cases one middle school can only provide six hours employment for the Assistant and this will necessitate sharing either with another middle school or with a high school, depending on the Assistant's particular interests and talents. Assistants who are primary trained may prefer younger children.

The Assistant is particularly acceptable at this level as being often the first contact for the majority of the pupils with a living, breathing, speaking representative of the foreign country, and is consequently a strong motivating influence. She is an invaluable source of first-hand information for pupils and a great asset for in-service training of the staff involved in teaching this language.

Finding the right level

The Assistant should very quickly become conversant with the aims, objectives and techniques of the course used and be prepared to limit strictly linguistic ambitions. Most mistakes are made by trying to teach structures or vocabulary that are too difficult. It cannot be stressed too strongly that, at this stage in particular, pupils need to feel that they are successful. Much can be learned by studying the scheme of work, becoming familiar with the course book and materials, attending departmental meetings, talking informally to modern language staff and above all observing lessons. After a concentrated period of observation of up to three weeks the Assistant will either be involved with withdrawal groups or with the teacher in the classroom. A combination of both systems seems often the most successful.

Contact with classes is more profitable if it is regular (even over a short period of time, eg the same group of eight for half a term) rather than spasmodic. The Assistant can contribute to the consolidation of *all* linguistic skills. As a native speaker, she can to a considerable degree replace or extend the use of taped material; many children are orally less inhibited at this stage and willing to play an active part in dialogues, playlets etc. Some teachers use the Assistant to help pupils practise reading aloud, but there are also possibilities of the Assistant encouraging and discussing reading for gist. She will not be greatly involved with writing skills at this stage, with the possible exception of helping pupils in correspondence with pen-friends, linked classes etc.

Motivating pupils

One of the main contributions of the Assistant to the teaching of modern languages in the middle years will be in the development of a positive and favourable attitude to her country, its inhabitants and its culture. This can be encouraged by personal and up to date background information.

Language games and activities are especially appropriate with this age range and can also increase the pupils' motivation. There are many materials and ideas available, and the Assistant should be instructed on how to obtain maximum benefit from them. A never-ending series of games of *Le Pendu* is of very limited value. There is plenty of scope for organising a French club, French days, competitions and *Pétanque* etc.

NB Many of the above suggestions are applicable to work in the early years of the secondary school.

B At intermediate level

The Assistant's work must be seen as an integral, not a peripheral part of the work of the modern language department. Her brief is not simply to conduct conversation but relates specifically also to the skills of listening and understanding and has implications for the whole of the fourth and fifth year work.

Many of the Assistant's groups will be pupils studying for examinations and the class-teacher must be confident that these groups are using their time profitably. This will mean monitoring the attitude and behaviour of pupils and the work of the Assistant, including periodic direct observation. This is clearly a professional duty of the head of department and should not be neglected. Depending on their own confidence, resourcefulness and personality some Assistants should be given more freedom than others, who may be better involved in team teaching, where their work can be more closely structured and monitored.

Many pupils will be motivated by the approaching examinations, though others may show little apparent interest in or aptitude for language learning. The initial observation of such groups by the Assistant should prove of immense value, since she will see the problem in context and the techniques used by teachers to deal with it. Despite this experience, many Assistants tend to be too academic in their approach and it is therefore important that they do not over-estimate pupil competence and that they build realistically on existing strengths. There must be frequent discussion, as part of the allotted twelve hours, between teacher and Assistant to discuss schedules, progress etc., perhaps at a fixed time each week. Too rigid a devotion to oral practice can kill interest, and the Assistant resents being used as a 'language machine', endlessly preparing pupils for 70 to 100 CSE questions or familiar 'O' level oral examination situations.

Specific suggestions

(i) *Oral examinations at GCE 'O' level and CSE*

- individual picture description. NB variation: Assistant does not show picture to group, but describes picture, which pupils then have to draw.
- * role-playing: eg whole dialogue on board, repeated, then one part/role erased. Class has to recall. Also possibility of group work based on

* = possibility of a form of team-teaching, often leading after initial presentation into group work, with pupil performance monitored by Assistant and teacher.

dialogue cards. Assistant takes one part initially. Sometimes Asssistant works in harness with teacher to present a model. Fictional characters (details on hand-outs) useful prelude to personal questions eg name, age, interests, family, etc.

- topic preparation: again Assistant can present model.
- reading practice: for pronunciation, intonation, fluency. Might be coupled with intensive question and answer on short text.
- prescribed questions: Assistant and teacher can present model eg questions with text, questions without text, answers without questions or text.
- general conversation: NB pupils as a group can question Assistant. Important to have realia (eg timetable, photograph, postcard) as starting point.
- dictation/transcription: ie text available if needed, making it a learning exercise rather than test.

(ii) Other aspects of GCE 'O' level and CSE work

- picture essay: NB can be built up via single pictures, suspense of the final picture. Model essay can be created by Assistant, possibly with the help of pupils, preferably by question and answer. Vocabulary content should be principally related to previous work.
- listening comprehension: copies of text should be available afterwards for use if required.
- reading comprehension: these exercises can also lead to re-telling of story, and possibly role-playing and dramatisation.
- multiple-choice comprehension: (meaning of distractors explained in foreign language).

(iii) Other suggestions

- gist comprehension: pupils summarise (in English?) what Assistant has said.
- interviews: eg pupils play the part of police interrogating the Assistant, a suspect.
- structured grammar practice: eg "what is happening in this picture?". Discard. "Now tell me what was happening". NB grammar explanations best left to the teacher but Assistant's notes on gaps in pupil's knowledge most useful for class-teacher.
- slides: for illustrated talk by Assistant or telling a story for which pupils have to write script/dialogue.
- talks, preferably with realia and related to Assistant's personal experience. May be in English.

- use of topical material: eg horoscope; small advertisements in a newspaper, ten-second motoring flash or weather forecast on radio; timetables etc. In general taped material should be brief so that it can be heard several times if necessary and exploited during one lesson.
- language games.
- songs, poems.
- personal interests and background of Assistant, usually of absorbing interest if realia (photographs etc) available.
- structured debates with able pupils; Assistant plus half the class proposes, teacher and half the class opposes.

See Appendix 1 for summary of activities.

NB In many schools, and especially where a second modern language is involved, the Assistant can withdraw appropriate pupils from a combined CSE/GCE class, so as to create a more homogenous teaching group.

C In the sixth form

This is the area where traditionally the Assistant is felt to be most useful, though the expansion of her role in many other situations may now have made her presence equally valuable to younger pupils. Nevertheless, the sixth former's foreign language knowledge and interests do give the Assistant much more scope. She can contribute to all aspects of 'A' level courses – whether with the teacher as a team, alone with pupils or making tapes – as well as to other areas of the sixth form curriculum.

The fact that the Assistant will be relatively close to the sixth former in age and interests is seen by some teachers as a danger, and the Assistant should perhaps be warned in extreme cases against over identification with her pupils. The 'closeness' can also be exploited, however; sixth formers can be given charge of the Assistant for the first week of term; there can be Assistant-pupil contact outside the twelve hours in lunch-time activities, clubs, societies, *soirées*, in all of which the Assistant can be assimilated as a person.

Work suggestions with 'A' level groups

Many activities can prepare equally well for more than one examination paper and even some of the games suggested in Appendix I can be played at a sufficiently sophisticated level to interest and instruct 'A' level pupils. Possible activities include the following:

- Assistant conducts question and answer sessions on set texts; discussion of narrative and character, not usually abstract ideas.
- Assistant reads aloud extract, short story, article for comprehension.
- teacher and Assistant discuss text with pupils brought in at opportune moments.

- analysis of texts: exploitation of literary, linguistic, historical features. Style important. Able pupils might consider several texts with same content and different overtones eg comparison of the same news item from different newspapers.
- debate: broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, etc.
- preparation of roles in drama (pupils each choose to be a main character from eg *La Peste* and describe his background and attitudes).
- essay prepared from leading article: Assistant with native sense of idiom corrects essays, but teacher grades.
- use of illustrative materials: menus, maps, guides, forms etc.
- pupils choose subjects and prepare lecturettes.
- pupils paraphrase/summarise extracts presented by Assistant: oral or written exercise.
- Assistant gives talk, pupils take notes in foreign language.
- use of TV, radio, etc. for background; teacher supports with slides.
- exploitation of Assistant's home environment, life-style etc; very important and often neglected.
- use of games, standard oral activities.
- intonation, pronunciation, reading: 'mock' orals.
- Assistant reinforces grammar teaching initiated by teacher; should not need to introduce new aspects.
- dictation/transcription.
- Assistant makes tapes for laboratory use.
- oral classes (outside set language lessons in pupils' free periods with complementary lunch-time sessions) geared to set situations, topics including those arising in other subject areas, grammatical points ie structured.
- Assistant joins teacher in prose work.
- Assistant prepares AEB-type topics.
- bilingual conversations: Assistant talks in her native tongue, pupils respond in English.

Other possible activities

- Assistant participates in intensive day or weekend courses: particularly useful for pupils who have started a new modern language in the sixth form.
- foreign language 'evenings'.
- foreign language clubs.
- Assistant talks, perhaps in English, on aspects of life in her country to groups of sixth formers other than foreign language 'A' level students, on 'one off' basis. Especially June/July when GCE in progress.
- Assistant takes groups out of school.
- Assistant uses social accomplishments, eg playing guitar.
- visiting Assistants can be invited from other neighbouring schools to talk on their own region/special interest.

6 If things go wrong

Obviously, in such a complex scheme involving so many individuals, some problems are inevitable. Assistants sometimes complain of a clash of personalities, lack of advice and encouragement, a feeling of being isolated in the staff room etc. Many of these difficulties have already been discussed in this guide and some solutions suggested. On the other hand, Headteachers and heads of department sometimes complain about their Assistants' absence, lateness, lack of cooperation, failure to develop relationships with pupils and staff, lack of preparation, laziness, unwillingness to follow instructions etc. This may be due to the personality of an Assistant who has failed to adapt to the demands of the British school system or the techniques of modern language teaching. In the majority of cases, some positive steps within the school can be taken to alleviate or improve the situation while the head of department dreams wistfully of last year's dynamic and vivacious Assistant or looks forward stoically to a more helpful and cooperative colleague the following year. Where, however, the situation deteriorates to an impossible working level there is a certain chain of action to be undertaken. The problem must be regarded initially as school based and the first step is *not* an urgent plea to the Central Bureau. If the matter cannot be solved within the pastoral organisation of the school itself, the head of department should make direct contact with the local modern language adviser or the person responsible for Assistants at the education office. It is the latter who, in certain circumstances, will see fit to contact the Central Bureau concerning a possible reallocation/replacement of an unsatisfactory Assistant and, even then, only in the most pressing circumstances.

Conclusion

In recent years the modern languages head of department has been beset by innovations and developments which have made the teaching of his subject more complex and demanding. The changing role of the Assistant is no exception. For many years, when modern languages were still taught only to the minority, the Assistant had a clearly defined but restricted task. Preparation for oral examinations – and, in some cases, providing the only spoken foreign language pupils ever heard – and a minimal involvement in departmental activities were often all that was required.

The pattern has altered considerably in the last decade. Now the Assistant can be encouraged to play a much more vital role in the development of all language skills for a much wider range of pupils. 'Conversation' is no longer the all-embracing job description. Careful planning, structure and continuing discussions are essential to help the Assistant fulfil the new role. As this guide has pointed out, this includes not only linguistic and social contact with pupils but the preparation of materials and in-service training of language teachers. The Assistant provides real and relevant contact with the foreign country – not only as a genuine, up to the minute representative of its culture but in certain areas (where Assistants are specifically requested from a linked *département* or *Land)* as a consultant, envoy and 'carrier-pigeon' to further contacts, exchanges and visits.

It is undeniable that the relative success or failure of the Assistant in the school will continue to depend largely on her own personality. However, it is equally true that at a time when financial stringencies are leading to a serious cut-back in the supply of Assistants and increasing questioning of the value of their presence in our schools, we as modern languages teachers need to make certain that this unique and essential human resource is utilised to the full. It is hoped that the experience and suggestions of the very wide variety of teachers, advisers and administrators as expressed in this document will help to enlarge and enrich the contributions which Assistants make to modern language teaching and ensure that they themselves gain the maximum possible benefit from their year abroad.

Appendix I: Summary of aids and activities for the Assistant

Most language departments possess a basic stock of audio-visual aids for use by the Assistant, such as records, slides, flash cards and posters. In some schools a small amount of capitation is set aside for the Assistant to buy certain items. It is very important, however, that the Assistant be invited to bring with her from her own country a supply of simple aids, particularly materials which illustrate aspects of her own background. Below is a suggested list of materials which may act as a guide for teachers when building up a stock for the Assistant and when writing to the Assistant before her arrival.

Maps and street plans of Assistant's home town; invitations (eg *faire parts* for weddings, births etc); timetables (train, bus, school, radio/TV); posters, notices, advertisements (including small ads, properties for sale etc); extracts from telephone directory; bills, shopping lists; used envelopes; page of real or imaginary diary; weather forecasts; official publications, forms; sounds recorded on cassette from Assistant's background, eg parents talking, favourite song, local accents, local characters; records; tourist brochures; slides; flash cards; postage stamps; postcards; used tickets; mail order catalogue; heart throb column from teenage magazines; telegram form and other post-office documents; recipes, drinks lists; menus; price lists; sports league tables; comics.

Reference has been made in chapter 5 to activities which the Assistant can organise with pupils at various levels. Comprehensive guides to these activities can be found listed in sections D and E of Appendix 2. Below is a selection of activities which in most cases can be adapted for use with a wide range of pupils. The list is by no means exhaustive.

Exercises: Oral description of picture; listen to tape – ask questions on it; discussion on certain topics eg arts, travel, sport, pop, eating and drinking, education, contemporary institutions, social problems, politics, careers, the environment with an emphasis on aspects relevant to the experience and interests of the Assistant and pupils; chain story – ie telling a story around the class; planning and shopping for a meal in the foreign language; playlets, puppet productions; using a *faire part* as means of introducing a family or discussing an event which has taken place in the life of the Assistant/pupils; aural comprehensions; filling in a blank map of Assistant's country to assess pupil's background knowledge; map reading; sentence building; story building; oral reproduction of a text; drawing the sketch of a story/joke (picture dictation); work in the language laboratory; preparing tapes for the lab; dictations, prepared mini-talks by pupils; songs; rhymes, tongue-twisters, poems; current affairs; newspaper articles/radio talks etc; describing how to do things eg boiling an egg.

Games: Card games such as Belote and Happy families; Twenty questions; crosswords; quizzes; memory games eg "I went to market and bought . . ."; number games (eg bingo); what to take on a desert island and why; what to jettison from a leaking balloon and why; completing the final picture of a cartoon; Pandora's box (lucky dip where blindfolded pupil has to describe the object he pulls out of the box); Simon says (*Jacques a dit* etc); Hangman; I spy (nouns); Charades; The minister's cat (adjectives); word associations; Scrabble; anagrams; balloon debate; Kim's game; Monopoly; guessing curious sounds; "What's my line?"; role playing; map jigsaw puzzles; 'nosey-Parker' game (draw large window on black board and Assistant/pupil describes imaginary scene in response to questions from the class); hiding and finding an object through questioning; Consequences.

Appendix 2: Bibliography

All the titles quoted below are appropriate for teachers' reference libraries. Advisers, teachers and others wishing to obtain handbooks for use by Assistants might consider in the first place numbers 18, 20 and 22. Further titles may be suggested by bibliographies appended to books and articles listed here.

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CILT Information Guides and Selected Reading Lists are available from CILT, 20 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AP, at 10p each.

What the Assistants say

"I asked questions, I corrected their pronunciation, I wrote part of the French texts. The teacher and I noticed that when I made a child repeat something in French, he did it better with me than with her."

"I think that at the beginning you have to establish a relationship. It doesn't matter whether it is in German or not and often you can search for other problems, why it is that they don't talk? You explain where their language is bad or good, and they realise that you are interested in them. So I didn't consider myself as a teacher."

"But I wasn't warned about the difficulties before I left France. We were supposed to give conversation to sensible people who really wanted to talk to us."

"I think the problem is that it should not be called conversation in middle school. We are doing something but it isn't conversation."

"I felt that the two French teachers in my school didn't take me seriously. They didn't even really know what my job was."

"In my case I felt that my head of department was very pleasant with me but incapable of telling me what to do on a practical level and finally gave me a lot of freedom. So much freedom indeed that, being left to myself, I did not know what to do, where to begin, how to do it . . ."

"I have experienced that the most useful and successful work I did was that which was achieved in cooperation with the teacher, in his own classroom".

"I would like to say that from a personal point of view, my stay in England has been a complete success. This experience has proved very valuable. However, I shall be returning to France this summer utterly frustrated and somewhat guilty as regards the professional side of my stay. The education authority has been paying me money to do work which I certainly did not fulfil. Any talents which I may or may not possess, but in my case was most willing to offer, have been by no means exploited in the schools in which I have worked".